



MRS. CLARA BELKNAP WOLCOTT.

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BY DR. J. M. SHAFFER.

Mrs. Clara Belknap Wolcott, daughter of Brigadier General William Goldsmith Belknap, U. S. A., died January 24, 1906, after a week's illness, and her death was the closing chapter in the life of one of the brightest women of Keokuk.

With a long line of good inheritance, Mrs. Wolcott was an interesting woman. She was a sister of the late Gen. William Worth Belknap, who was Secretary of War under President Grant, and a resident of Keokuk. She came to Keokuk in the early fifties from New York, and made it her continuous home. Her marriage to Arthur Wolcott occurred in 1854. He died here many years ago.

During her early life she received an excellent education, and by her ready application to study she became a woman of unusual intelligence. Increasing years did not affect her clearness of thought and she remained a bright and entertaining person until the last moments. She possessed a refinement, a gentleness, a loveliness of character that endeared her to all. In her Christian work she was sincere; was one of the oldest members of Westminster Presbyterian church, and took an active interest in its affairs. An only daughter, Miss Bertha Wolcott of this city, survives.

Clara Belknap Wolcott was born in Newburgh on the Hudson, New York, and when but a few months old was taken to that wild western country, when there were but few white inhabitants, and where her father was to establish the Post of Fort Leavenworth. After a few years, she was removed to Bedloe's Island, which was then a garrison, where her father was in command, and one of her earliest recollections was that of crossing to New York every day, with her sister, in a boat rowed by soldiers, to attend school. She was then sent to a Young Ladies' Seminary in Newburgh, where she was one of the best students, and was especially proficient in music and French. Her father had already gone to Florida, during the Seminole war, and was stationed at Fort Brooke,

Tampa. He decided to have his family with him, so they left New York on a sailing vessel, but on the way were shipwrecked, and were tossed on shore at Key West. From there, they managed to reach Tampa. Here they were in constant expectation of an uprising of the Indians, but most of the Indians liked General Belknap and had dubbed him "The Alligator Chief," as he walked through the Everglades with no fear of the alligators; and one of her most cherished relics is a pipe in the shape of an alligator, carved by the Indian chief, Wild Cat.

The Mexican War at this time, 1846, called for the "bravest of the brave," and her father went with the army into Mexico, and became Inspector General on General Taylor's staff.

Her brother, William Worth Belknap, now being ready for college, she, with her mother and sister, went to live at Princeton, N. J., and stayed there until his graduation.

Her next move was to Forts Smith and Gibson, in the Cherokee Nation, inhabited by the rich and powerful tribe of Cherokees. From here her father was sent to Texas to locate posts, and while there, although very ill, refused to leave his post of duty, and there died in 1851. The family then went to visit relatives in Ohio, and subsequently removed to Keokuk, where W. W. Belknap, who had been studying law, was located. Here she married Arthur Wolcott, of an old New England family; she had three children, a daughter Anne, buried in Saratoga, N. Y., a son Arthur Ellsworth, buried at Keokuk, and a daughter Bertha.

During the Grant administration she was with her brother in Washington part of one year, while he was Secretary of War. She lived several years in Boston, while she was educating her daughter; later she returned to Keokuk, where she spent her remaining days.

She had a remarkable mind, and just before her death held long conversations in French. Towards the end she suffered greatly, but would not utter a groan, saying that she came from a long line of warriors, of military stock, and she must not show pain. She often spoke of liking the quotation from Shakespeare, which is on her brother's monument at

Arlington, and in the words of which she so firmly believed—  
“So part we sadly, in this troublous world, to meet with joy  
in sweet Jerusalem.”

The following biographical sketch of the mother of the deceased is from the pen of Gen. Ver Planck Van Antwerp and is copied from the *Keokuk Daily Gate City* of December 22, 1858:

Mrs. Anne Clark Belknap was no ordinary person, her character approached as near perhaps to perfection as any that one ever meets with, and her life was one of vicissitudes such as but few women encounter. With advantages of early education and association among the most intelligent and accomplished society, she possessed in a marked degree that delicate refinement of women which ever characterizes the well bred lady. As such, she was at once recognized whether at the capitol of our country or on the most remote western wilds.

There was about her at all times and under all circumstances that rare blending of perfect sweetness of temper and pleasing dignity of deportment that immediately won the respect and esteem of all who came within her influence; sentiments which grew daily in strength upon a continued acquaintance.

Ever cheerful, yet not frivolous, it was at all times a real pleasure to meet Mrs. Belknap, especially when welcomed at her own door or under her most hospitable roof. Who that was often favored with that privilege can forget the kindly greeting with which they were ever met? And yet how utterly free from the slightest tinge of ostentatious display were the receptions under that roof.

The wife of a gallant and distinguished soldier, the late Brigadier General William G. Belknap, with whom she united her fortunes ere her husband yet attained high rank and distinction, Mrs. Belknap came with her husband to the then far West, more than a third of a century ago, to lead a frontier life, at what were, at that time, the outposts of our battle array. Crossing from Green Bay, one of the outposts to the Mississippi, and proceeding down the latter to St. Louis, she passed this point over thirty years ago, when there was not yet a human habitation here, save perhaps the wigwams of the Sacs and Foxes, old Black Hawk, Keokuk and their associates; long, in fact, ere even the Territory of Iowa was ushered into existence, and while it still formed a part—not of Wisconsin, but of Michigan.

Of what now constitutes the Territory of Kansas, Mrs. Belknap was perhaps the first white woman that ever became an inhabitant. Her husband, then Captain Belknap, was ordered to establish a military post on the Missouri, which he did accordingly, probably in 1827 or '28, with the name of Ft. Leavenworth, near where the present city of the same name stands. While the buildings for this post were being

erected, Mrs. Belknap, like a true soldier's wife, ate and slept under a tent, until they were ready to be occupied.

Subsequently she followed her husband to Florida, where he had been ordered during the campaign with the Seminoles; and, later still, she accompanied him to the posts on the Arkansas, Forts Smith and Gibson, where this devoted and noble wife, always of a frail constitution and never of robust health, spent several years more, far removed from those thousand comforts and refinements to which she had been accustomed in early life. Did she complain of this? Never! but remained always the same true Christian woman, and devoted wife and mother.

The gallant part acted by Gen. Belknap during the war of 1846 with Mexico, in which he again distinguished himself at Palo Alto, Resaca, and other fields, is doubtless familiar to the reader. After his death, which occurred in 1851, in Texas, where he was on duty with his troops, Mrs. Belknap, accompanied by her estimable and highly intelligent daughters, came here to join her only son and make this her home.

Reference has been made above to her cheerful and happy temperament and to the fact that it was under her own hospitable roof that these beautiful traits were most strikingly developed. It was there that she ever appeared a true model for her sex, not only in her domestic relations, but in its avocations as well. With what admirable system were all of the latter performed; and what scrupulous neatness and order reigned ever, over the entire premises—indoor and out; and this without the least apparent bustle, confusion, or inconvenience to either visitors or the household; perfection of housekeeping—not the least difficult of arts!—HOME—that home where so much of the last few years of her life were spent—was to her evidently one of calm and true rational enjoyment; while to her friends one of never-failing attractions.

But it was as a sincere and genuine, though wholly unpretentious, Christian that the character of Mrs. Belknap shone forth in its greatest beauty and loveliness. That she was a true Christian, if one ever lived, nobody for a moment doubted who knew her well. It was clearly mirrored upon her ever calm and serene countenance and evidenced in the daily acts of her life; yet she never obtruded her religion upon others, nor made a public display of it, to attract the world's gaze—if not to enlist its praise! Nor does the writer remember to have ever once heard her condemn, by a single harsh or unkind word, any human being whose opinions or creed, be they what they might, were not in accord with her own. If, as she thought, wrong, it ever seemed with her a source of real, unfeigned regret, rather than a different feeling, so commonly evinced. Oh! what a reformation will that be, if it ever occurs, when all professing Christians shall act thus. How infinitely greater the influence they will then exercise.

Charity, no less than faith and hope, was a cardinal and a practical principle in the Christianity of Mrs. Belknap; charity which, if not, as claimed by one of the master spirits of the world, "the essence of Christianity," is at least one of its essential elements—without which it can have no existence.

But enough; it is most gratifying to know that the subject of this imperfect sketch was one whose practice in life, no more than her avowed principles, were never called in question.

Truly it may be said, she probably had not an enemy on earth; and that,

"None knew her but to love her,  
None named her but to praise."

KEOKUK, Dec. 20, 1858.

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THE BACKWOODSMAN has many substantial enjoyments. After the fatigue of his journey, and a short season of privation and danger, he finds himself surrounded with plenty. His cattle, hogs and poultry supply his table with meat; the forest abounds in game, the fertile soil yields abundant crops; he has, of course, bread, milk and butter; the rivers furnish fish, and the woods honey. For these various articles there is at first no market, and the farmer acquires the generous habit of spreading them profusely on his table, and giving them freely to a hungry traveler and an indigent neighbor. Hospitality and kindness are among the virtues of the first settlers. Exposed to common dangers and toils, they become united by the closest ties of social intercourse. Accustomed to arm in each other's defence, to aid in each other's labor, to assist in the affectionate duty of nursing the sick, and the mournful office of burying the dead, the best affections of the heart are kept in constant exercise; and there is, perhaps, no class of men in our country who obey the calls of friendship, or the claims of benevolence with such cheerful promptness, or with so liberal a sacrifice of personal convenience.—*Judge Hall's Sketches of the West.*

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